

# HISTELEEC NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTH WESTERN ELECTRICITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Web Site : [www.swehs.co.uk](http://www.swehs.co.uk)

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## NEW COMMITTEE FOR 2001/02

At the AGM on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> March at Taunton, a new Chairman was elected. John Gale took over from Barrie Phillips, who bowed out after a very successful two years, which saw not only the membership grow to the present high figure of 110 together with higher attendances generally at all the events.

## NEW OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES

### MAIN COMMITTEE

**CHAIRMAN:** John Gale  
**V-CHAIRMAN:** Chris Buck  
**TREASURER :** Clive Goodman  
**SECRETARY:** Peter Lamb  
**MEMBERS:** Brian Grimshaw, Roger Hughes, Paul Hulbert, David Hutton, David Peacock

### SOUTH SUB-COMMITTEE

**CHAIRMAN:** Roger Christy  
**MEMBERS:** John Ferrier, Ted Luscombe, Mike Wreford

Another stalwart, Mike Williams stood down also. He had been on the committee, since inception and is I/C of the Museum Collection. He will be missed.

We are pleased to welcome two new members to the Committee, Brian Grimshaw and Roger Hughes.

After the AGM new member, John Perkin, entertained members with "Taunton Tramways", see separate report.

## INTERESTING SUPPLEMENT

We are indebted to Graham Warburton for researching amongst the Archives for information on a major project in SWEB's past "Rural Development", which is the subject of the accompanying supplement.

## MANOR HOUSE HOTEL, MORTENHAMPSTEAD

Do not forget the new event in our Summer calendar, which is a Sunday Lunch at the Manor House Hotel on SUNDAY 15<sup>th</sup> JULY.

## CAIRNS ROAD EDUC/VISITOR CENTRE

WPD have given their approval for an expenditure to get the project started. We are pressing for the order to be placed with the builder. The possible need for additional expenditure by the Society was discussed at the AGM. It was agreed, if the occasion arose, to ask for voluntary donations or loans from members instead of increasing subscriptions. Also SWEB was suggested as a possible sponsor.

## ROBERT SYMONS

Had you realised that Robert Symons, who addressed our Annual Luncheon in 1999, is not only Chief Executive of Western Power Distribution, but also Hyder and thus SWALEC. Since he still lives in Plymouth, he must be doing an incredible mileage. One has got to be very fit to carry out such an exacting role!

## PRINCETOWN

Ted Luscombe has been researching early Devon electricity supplies and has found a generating station building still intact at Princetown, of which we have no information in the Archives. Well done, Ted.

## FOOT & MOUTH

*(The editor asked member Brian Byng, a Dartmoor Guide to update us on the situation)*

### Devon is closed - almost!

It is difficult to sort out fact from hysteria but there is obviously a very serious situation, which is causing huge stress and problems for farmers. Although Devon apparently supplies 25% of the country's animal products tourism here is about twice the size in both value and in the number of people employed. The farmers are the only ones, who will automatically get some compensation. There are no procedures for compensating anyone else, who are also stressed and facing big financial problems.

It is forbidden to walk on Dartmoor or open land anywhere - penalty fine up to £5000. National Trust properties are closed, including huge sections of the coastal footpath. We have been told not to travel unless our journey is really necessary. I have had all.

### FOOT & MOUTH continued

my walks cancelled until end March & I expect to be told to cancel through to end April any day now. I have been advised against taking coach parties just to drive along moorland roads. Hotels are shut, visitor facilities are shut, people are cancelling holidays, meetings and any kind of visit here because that is the message that has been sent out.

We are told that access to Dartmoor will not be permitted until a minimum of 30 clear days after the last reported case. The tourism brains have just woken up to the fact that as people are cancelling meetings, visits or holidays for some reason there is another big problem here & they are having meetings themselves - not in Devon surely - to find out what can be done! Maybe we shall see a relaxation of this policy but I suppose that depends on whether the epidemic begins to subside.

Sheep & cattle roam free on Dartmoor & the doomsday scenario is that it has got into or will get into these free roaming animals. They were talking about closing all roads on Dartmoor and getting army marksmen in to cull wildlife like deer, hedgehogs & squirrels!!! -I thought this really is bordering on the hysterical & it seems to have gone quiet for now.

Even so I guess people come here to enjoy the open countryside & when it is shut they stay away. I thought the National Parks were created for people to visit & enjoy, but I see that they all seem to have closed their gates to people.

I really hope that out of this will come a realisation that tourism here is more valuable than farming & that farmers who after all are into the tourism industry in abig way themselves should so organise their industry, so that this sort of thing cannot be spread so far so fast again.

*Brian Byng*

### **OKEHAMPTON PICTURE**

Mike Wreford, a keen historian and cricketer, never dreamed that when he bought an old cricket print, that he would find an item of electricity history inside. There were two pages of the Western Times dated 24<sup>th</sup> December 1931. Surprise, surprise, it included a report on the opening of the new generating station by the Mayor of Okehampton in the presence of Frank Christy. A full description of the plant is included, a valuable archive for the Society indeed.

### **NEW MUSEUM**

The "Arthur C. Clarke World of the Future" will open in Hunts Court, Corporation Street, Taunton later this year to honour Taunton's most famous son, the writer of science fiction, such as "Space Odyssey".

### **REVIEW - BUCKFAST ABBEY VISIT & ANNUAL LUNCHEON**

On a cold wintry Saturday morning late in January, members and guests gathered for a visit to Buckfast Abbey prior to the Annual Luncheon at the Dartbridge Inn. We were divided into two groups. The first group took the "warm tour" and the second the "cold tour" and after V\* hour swapped over.

The "warm tour" conducted by Brother Henry, guided us through the Abbey Church relating its history, building and the people involved. The present building was started in 1907 and the final stone laid in 1937. The outside of the building is constructed of local blue limestone with mellow Ham stone from Somerset for windows and tower. This contrasts with the white Bath stone used inside together with Devon red sandstone for the vaulting.

The "cold tour" conducted by Brother Richard, took us on a brisk walk through the grounds passing the beehives and visiting the honey processing rooms. Buckfast Honey had been made world famous by the late Brother Adam. We walked alongside the River Dart and were shown the leat leading to the two small hydro-generating sets in separate rooms.

Following these very interesting tours, we thanked the Brothers and sped the 2 minute drive to the Dartbridge Inn. This delightful hostelry was a superb location for the Annual Luncheon coupled with our excellent guest speaker, Scovell Whitmore, who was SWEB's Deputy Chairman in the "Golden Years". He outlined his working relationship with the then Chairman, Bill Irens and we were all entertained and amused with his delightful delivery of fascinating anecdotes of his time with SWEB.

Together with the excellent day as above arranged by Barrie and 69 members and guests attending, this has to have been the best Annual Luncheon to date.

*Mike Williams*

**BLETCHLEY PARK/ALAN TURING** With the trip to Bletchley Park this month, electronic members may be interested that the Turing Archive has gone "on-line" hosted by University of Southampton at <http://www.turingarchive.org/>

### **BLACK COUNTRY MUSEUM**

Recently we acquired archives with reference to anti-pollution and smoke abatement programmes of the 1950's, which included a newspaper cutting showing a view over the Black Country taken from Dudley Castle, showing smoky chimneys. Peter Lamb recognised the view, which now includes the above Museum and sent it to them. They are delighted with the acquisition giving a special accession reference.

## **REVIEW OF AGM & TALK**

The day began at the WPD training Centre, where our Web Master, Marcus Palmen, gave members an informative demonstration of our web site. It is a considerable web site with many fascinating pages and linkages to other electrical and historical web sites. It is clear that our Society, although mainly interested in the past will reap many benefits from this amazing technology of the present.

Good food and an excellent service were had at the nearby Merry Monk Inn, at Monkton Heathfield, even though they were very busy.

The AGM followed back at the Training Centre, which was made even more lively by the Chairman warning anyone noted taking an after lunch nap might find themselves elected to the committee!

Finally John Perkin, member and Taunton Deane's Electrical/Mechanical Engineer, conducted us on a nostalgic "journey" back through time aboard Taunton Tramways (or Taunton and West Somerset Electric Railways and Tramways Company, as it was

originally known). This year being the centenary year of the Tramway, is an appropriate time to make the virtual journey. John's presentation included a mixture of overhead transparencies and slides as well as a small exhibition of working model trams and other memorabilia. The one and half mile journey from East Reach to Rowbarton through Taunton's traffic free streets provided glimpses of the town's buildings of yesteryear and a trip down memory lane for many. The fare at 2d (yes, old pence) proved a bargain. Small wonder that the company only once paid a dividend to its shareholders and became the second tramway in the England to close through financial difficulties in 1921.

*David Hole*

## **COLIN HILL REMEMBERS HINKLEY**

The recent visit to Hinkley Point prompted me to recall my move to the Station in 1962.

I had spent five years as a student apprentice with the Yorkshire Division of BEA/CEA/CEGB (the name changed fairly regularly) and was employed as a General Assistant Engineer on shift at Wakefield "B" Power Station. This was equipped with four 60MW units burning pulverised coal. In 1961 we were being supplied with trainloads of a substance called Eckington Mixture, which was supposed to be coal, but was a grey slurry-like material with high ash and moisture content and low calorific value. It also had little surprises within each wagon:- railway sleepers, grass, dead rabbits, cans, bottles and barbed wire. Its attraction was its low cost. We would probably have produced some of the cheapest units in the Country had we been able to mill and burn the stuff. As it was, each shift

was a constant battle to clear out the rubbish and maintain a meagre stream of p.f. to the boilers. We generated very little.

At 0200 one morning our Control Engineer, Bob, passed me a pink vacancy notice for a shift post at Hinkley Point Atomic Power Station "I don't know anything about atomic power and I don't even know where it is", was my response. "There's all you need to know on there" was the reply, "you'll double your pay and they've no coil (tr:coal)". So confident I had no chance, I applied. It was thus that I spent 31 years at Hinkley Point "A" and "B"!

I imagined Bridgwater would be something like Clovelly. It was not. On my first day I approached the smart administration block entrance feeling quite proud. As I entered, a voice called from under the staircase "Do you want any seed potatoes?" Hardly what I expected, but at least it was a friendly greeting. The new recruits from all over Britain were put through intensive training courses, where our minds were boggled with facts on reactor physics, health physics, fuel handling plant, burst-cartridge detection systems, variable frequency blower drives, diesel generators for essential supply systems, seal-air systems, reactor safety systems... The list seemed endless. Bob had told me they had "no coil", but he never mentioned what they did have!

Soon we were on shift inside Reactor 2, checking the laying of graphite bricks to form the reactor core. Inside the reactor pressure-vessel everything, except us, was black. Soon dust from the graphite blocks turned us a matching shiny black colour. No coal! It was almost like being in a coal mine. Later in 1962 our new-found soft, southern existence was shattered by the 1962/63 winter. We now resorted to stoking coke braziers to prevent the plant freezing up. As a foot of snow fell to enliven our journeys to the remote site, we made our first contribution to the strained grid system by using our diesel generators at periods of red and yellow warnings. All this seemed a far cry from the clean, "Tomorrow's World" technology we had imagined. Coal firing didn't seem so bad after all. At least Eckington Mixture kept us warm.

Little did we know that it was to be another two years before our first nuclear generation, but that's another story.

*Colin Hill*

## **HOLIDAY HOUSE TO LET**

Member Margaret May has a delightful house in Languedoc region of southern France to let. It is 30 miles from both the Mediterranean and Montpellier. If interested, ring her on Tel: 01823 331473

## STATIONARY STEAM ENGINES

Flyers were circulated with the last newsletter for the publication, "Stationary Steam Engines of Great Britain" by the late George Watkins. We did promise to give the address of the editor, Mr A.P. Woolrich husband of member Mrs. Jane Woolrich. In case you may wish to get copies direct, their address is :- Canalside, Huntworth, Bridgwater, TA7 OAJ

### "TWO-SIX HEAVE"

When you have a gang of men pulling cables, you need to get them coordinated, so that they all pull together at the same moment. In Bristol - the command was "two-six, heave". The "two-six" was a warning to get ready, and the gang pulled on the "heave". Why you may ask?

Not many people realise that this was a hangover from the Royal Navy in Nelson's time. The members of the gun-crew each had numbers, which pulled at the same moment, or the cannon would slew round and not go back squarely. I do not know whether this command is used elsewhere, and I would be interested to hear about any other historical phrases in use. (There's a challenge for you, Ed.)

Paul Hulbert

## ELECTRICITY POEMS

*(From the Archives - the Borough of Torquay Electricity Undertaking dated April 1933)*

### 1833-1933

In days of old, so we are told,  
Wives stayed at home, they could not roam,  
To keep homes bright was their delight,  
So all the day they worked away,  
They never stopped until they dropped,  
Those wives of old, so we are told.

Those wives of old, they were not told,  
Of future homes, electric homes,  
Kept clean and bright by labour light,  
Homes of pleasure, with hours of leisure,  
The modern home is the electric home,  
So start today, the electric way.

### NURSERY RHYMES UPDATED

Little Polly Flinders, sat among the cinders  
To warm her pretty little toes,  
Her mother came and caught her and beat her little  
daughter,  
For spoiling her nice new clothes,

Modern Polly Flinders does not need cinders  
To warm her pretty little toes,  
With electric fires for heating, she does not get a  
beating,  
For she does not spoil her nice new clothes.

## WET & WENDY

A company is seeking planning permission to build a wind-farm in the Bristol Channel. Wind turbines 200ft high would be built on platforms anchored to the seabed. The electricity generated would be brought ashore at Hinkley Point.

## BOOK REVIEW

"The Victorian Internet" by Tom Standage (Phoenix £6.99) is a popular history of the telegraph from its origins in optical telegraphy, through Wheatstone and Morse, via the adventures of transatlantic cable laying to the introduction of the telephone. It's not a very technical book, but it has good coverage of the social and economic impact of the telegraph. Standage covers subjects as diverse as the first marriage by telegraph (1876 - the groom and bride were in Arizona and the clergyman was 650 miles away in San Diego). Also the Crimean War, where the first despatches from the Times correspondent led to a public appeal to fund Florence Nightingale's mercy mission Recommended as a good read.

Paul Hulbert

## DIARY NOTE

### TUES. 12<sup>th</sup> MAY - EXETER MEETING

#### "BRUNEL IN THE SOUTH WEST"

Slide/talk at the Riverside Christian Centre, Exeter by Peter Gray at 2.00pm, preceded by a buffet lunch.

### SAT. 30<sup>th</sup> JUNE - VISIT TO KEMBLE - 2.00pm

BRISTOL AERO COLLECTION preceded by lunch at Plough Inn, Crudwell

### SUN. 15<sup>th</sup> JULY - SUNDAY LUNCH AT THE

### MANOR HSE HOTEL. MORETONHAMPSTEAD

from 12.15pm

### SAT. 29<sup>th</sup> SEPT. VISIT SEATON TRAMWAY

Lunch before at the Harbour Inn, Axmouth.

### FRI/SAT/SUN. 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> OCTOBER

#### SNOWDONIA WEEKEND

### SAT. 24<sup>th</sup> NOV. -BRISTOL MEETING "HISTORY OF CLEFTON SUSP. BRIDGE"

Slide/talk at the Rudleigh Inn, Easton-in-Gordano by the Bridge-Master, preceded by lunch there.

## NEXT EDITION

This newsletter is produced every four months, depending upon material available. Please send information, articles, photographs or letters to Peter Lamb at 35 Station Road, Backwell, Bristol BS19 3NH or telephone him on 01275 463160 Or e-mail him on [lambpandv@talk21.com](mailto:lambpandv@talk21.com)